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Supreme Court's Ruling on ONORC System for Migrant Workers

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Why in News

Recently, the **Supreme Court** directed all states and Union Territories (UT) to implement the **One Nation, One Ration Card (ONORC) system** by 31st July 2021.

The scheme allows migrant labourers covered under the **National Food Security Act (NFSA)** to access food at any fair price shop with his or her ration card in any part of the country.

Key Points

- **Right to Food:**

The **fundamental right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution** may be interpreted to **include the right to live with human dignity, having the right to food** and other basic necessities.
- **Importance of Migrants:**
 - There are around **38 crore workers** engaged in the unorganized sectors (National Statistics Office (NSO) data of 2017-2018).
 - These unorganized workers **did not have any permanent source of employment and have engaged themselves in small time vocations and occupations** at various places away from their native places.
 - **Contributions** of these labourers towards different projects, industries, make considerable **additions in the economic development of the country.**

- **Database:**
 - Criticized the Labour Ministry for not completing the work of the Rs 45.39-crore **National Database for Unorganised Workers (NDUW) portal** to register and identify migrant workers.
 - The Court had ordered the Ministry to finalise the NDUW module way back in 2018.
 - Directed the States/UTs to register establishments and license contractors under the **Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979** and ensure that they provide the authorities complete details of the workers employed with them.
- **Redetermination of Beneficiaries under NFSA:**
 - Directed the Centre “**to undertake exercise under Section 9 of the National Food Security Act, 2013**” to re-determine the total number of persons to be covered under Rural and Urban areas of the State.

ONORC System

- **Background:**
 - Under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, about 81 crore people are entitled to buy subsidised food grains - rice at Rs 3/kg, wheat at Rs 2/kg, and coarse grains at Re 1/kg – from designated fair price shops.
 - However, **NFSA beneficiaries were not able to access their PDS (Public Distribution System) benefits outside the jurisdiction of the specific fair price shop** to which they have been assigned.
 - By introducing ONORC, the idea was to reform the PDS, which has been historically marred by inefficiency and leakages.
- **Launch:**
 - ONORC was launched in August, 2019.
- **Aim:**
 - The ONORC scheme is **aimed at enabling migrant workers and their family members** to buy subsidised ration from any fair price shop anywhere in the country under the NFSA.
 - To promote this reform in the PDS, the government has provided **incentives** to states and also set a **precondition for additional borrowing** by states during the Covid-19 pandemic last year.

- **Technology Used:**

- ONORC is based on technology that **involves details of beneficiaries' ration card, Aadhaar number, and electronic Points of Sale (ePoS)**. The system identifies a beneficiary through biometric authentication on ePoS devices at fair price shops.
- The system runs with the support of two portals - **Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS)** and **Annavitran**.

While the **Annavitaran portal maintains a record of intra-state transactions** - inter-district and intra-district - the **IM-PDS portal records the inter-state transactions**.

- **ONORC Coverage:**

- Till date, 32 states and UTs have joined the ONORC, covering about 69 crore NFSA beneficiaries.
- Four states are **yet to join the scheme - Assam, Chhattisgarh, Delhi and West Bengal**.
- While inter-state ration card portability is available in 32 states, the number of such transactions is much lower than that of intra-district and inter-district transactions.

- **Benefits:**

- Under the ONORC, the beneficiaries from one state can get their share of rations in other states where the ration card was originally issued.
- ONORC will also give the beneficiaries the opportunity to opt for the dealer of their choice.
- It will be particularly beneficial for women and other disadvantaged groups, given how social identity (caste, class and gender) and other contextual factors (including power relations) provide a strong backdrop in accessing PDS.
- This will help achieve the **target set under SDG (Sustainable development Goals) 2** (Ending hunger by 2030). Also, it will address the poor state of hunger in India, as highlighted by the **Global Hunger Index**, where India has been ranked 94 out of 107 countries.

Source: IE